

THE GENESIS OF MACAULAY'S HISTORY

5

years. From the commencement of Walpole's administration to the commencement of the American war, events may be despatched more concisely. From the commencement of the American war it will again become necessary to be copious. These, at least, are my present notions. How far I shall bring the narrative down I have not determined. The death of George the Fourth would be the best halting-place. The History would then be an entire view of all the transactions which took place, between the Revolution which brought the Crown into harmony with the Parliament, and the Revolution which brought the Parliament into harmony with the nation. But there are great and obvious objections to contemporary history. To be sure, if I live to be seventy, the events of George the Fourth's reign will be to me then what the American war and the Coalition are to me now.¹

Six months later, after further considering the matter, Macaulay came to the conclusion that he must prefix to his account of the Revolution not only a summary of the previous history of England, but a detailed narrative of the reign of James II.

I have thought a good deal during the last few days about my History. The great difficulty of a work of this kind is the beginning. How is it to be joined on to the preceding events? Where am I to commence it? I cannot plunge, slap dash, into the middle of events and

characters. I cannot, on the other hand, write
a history of
the whole reign of James the Second as a
preface to the
history of William the Third ; and, if I did, a
history of
Charles the Second would still be equally
necessary, as
a preface to that of the reign of James the
Second. I
sympathise with the poor man who began the
war of Troy
* gemino ab ovo | But, after much
consideration, I
think that I can manage, by the help of an
introductory

¹ Letter to Napier, July 20, 1838. The Life and Letters of
Lord Macaulay,
by George Otto Trevelyan (2 vols.; 1876), ii. 13-14.